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SUBJECT: QUEBEC CITY 400TH ANNIVERSARY

1. (SBU) Summary: CG and Embassy Minister Counselor for Public Affairs met Oct 14-15 with federal, provincial and municipal representatives involved with planning Quebec's 400th Anniversary in 2008. Quebec Mayor L'Allier pushed for a visible U.S. legacy in the form of a genealogy center, while Provincial government representatives expressed strong reservations with the Mayor's proposal, pointing out that it would cost the Provincial government 40 million CND for infrastructure work alone. CG and PAO indicated the limits of our ability to provide major funding for a large-scale legacy project but that we remained open to discussing ways in which we can support a genealogy project that makes connections between the U.S. and Quebec (and Canada more broadly). End summary.

2. (SBU) Quebec mayor Jean-Paul L'Allier, who is hoping the U.S. will contribute to the creation of a genealogy center to mark the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City in 2008, came well-prepared to his Oct. 14 meeting with CG and PAO. L'Allier and his team handed us a project proposal complete with maps and floor plans for a Genealogy and Heritage Center that would be built in an 18th century building in Old Quebec known as "The New Barracks." L'Allier underscored the importance and history of US-Canada and US-Quebec ties and noted that the 400th anniversary is an opportunity for the U.S. to establish a visible presence (a "legacy") in Quebec, which is currently lacking. L'Allier believes U.S. involvement is appropriate, given that up to 15 million Americans have origins in Quebec and that a large part of the U.S. is former New France territory.

3. The following day, L'Allier organized a tour for us of the Barracks, which will need considerable infrastructure repair and renovation. L'Allier advisor Jacques Jobin, who accompanied us on the tour, indicated the municipal government is confident that the Provincial government will pay the 40 million CND cost of rebuilding the outside of the building, a project which would take about three years. There was no direct discussion of who would cover the cost of the inside of the building, i.e., staffing, equipping and running the center itself, but it was clear the municipal government is looking for others to foot this part of the bill. (Comment: By the end of PAO's two-day visit, it became apparent that the municipal government is hoping the USG either covers these "inside the building" costs, or assumes the burden of finding donors to do so. End Comment.)

4. (SBU) Our Oct. 15 meeting with Provincial government officials revealed a difference of opinion between L'Allier's office and the Provincial government. Sam Hamad, Charest's Minister responsible for the Quebec capital region (also Minister for Energy and Resources), and his team indicated to us they were not pleased L'Allier was assuming the GoQ would contribute 40 million CND for renovation of the New Barracks. GoQ 400th anniversary Commissioner Raymond Lesage, who works for Hamad, said there is a limited amount of Provincial money for 400th anniversary events. Every time money is spent on a "legacy" project, it means less money for 400th anniversary festivities.

5. (SBU) Despite their irritation with L'Allier, Provincial officials were careful not to flat out reject the genealogy center project. They wanted to know how much the U.S. would be willing to invest. PAO made clear that the USG does not have large sums of money to devote to "legacy" projects such as building a monument. We would probably be able to assist along the lines of hosting a seminar or conference around the theme of the Quebec roots of Americans.

Comment

6. Throughout the visit, CG and PAO gently but clearly indicated the limits of our ability to provide major funding for a large-scale legacy project. We also indicated that we remain very open to discussing ways in which we can support a genealogy project that makes connections between the U.S. and Quebec (and Canada more broadly) through our shared immigrant experience. We are similarly open to other ideas that would highlight our shared "North American" experience. We will continue to explore possibilities for USG/Mission contributions to the 400th anniversary celebration through cultural and academic exchange programs."

17. L'Allier's desire for a "legacy" investment from the USG is part of his quite understandable effort as mayor to seize the opportunity presented by the 400th to beautify his city. (The "New Barracks" were to have been renovated several years ago to make room for a branch of Laval University, but that project fell through because of lack of funds.) We note that for the 300th anniversary, the only legacy project was the creation of the Plains of Abraham Park by the Government of Canada. Foreign governments were asked to participate in festivities and the Vice President represented the U.S. at that celebration.